**Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Rabbits and Hawks

**Pre-reading questions: Making Connections**

1. What is DNA? How can it be used to investigate crimes? Make connections to what you are learning in biology. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. How would the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* have been different if DNA testing had existed in the 1930s?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Ira Glass:** And we begin our show with Act One, an act that we are calling Rabbits and Hawks. This is a story about some teenagers who were wrongfully convicted of murder and who served 15 years before DNA evidence got them out. One of the things that's extraordinary about this story is that there is no ambiguity at all at this point about their innocence. We don't have to wonder about any little loopholes. Not only did DNA evidence prove that they had not done the crime, two other guys confessed to the crime 15 years after the fact and their DNA evidence was a perfect match. Shane DuBow about tells this story and explains how police pinned the crime on these first guys.

Fun Fact: This is the year Mrs. Navarro was born. How long is it after *To Kill a Mockingbird* took place? How long is it after Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Shane Dubow:** This is the story of how one tragedy became two. The first involves a young woman named Lori Roscetti who was raped and killed in **1986**. The second involves four innocent teenagers who were wrongfully imprisoned for that crime. In Chicago that year, 284 other murders took place. But Lori's was the one that grabbed the top headlines and came to be viewed as a symbol as much as anything else. A typical quote from the papers read, "It wasn't just a murder. It was a bestial, barbaric, horrifying, senseless massacre."

She was a medical student, bright, promising. Of course the fact that she was also white medical student murdered in a black neighborhood was a constant subtext. Her body was found by some railroad tracks, not far from her car. Her head had been bashed in with a rock. When no arrest came quickly, people got upset. A reward was offered. There was a march on a police station. Some students held a vigil. The pressure was on and the police needed suspects. On January 24, three months after the murder, they dragged in 16-year-old Larry Ollins.

3. Explain (in three sentences or more) how this real-life case connects to *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Use textual evidence, examples, and characters’ names.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A little about Larry. He's got an angular build, a slow smile, and a habit of squinting that can make him seem moody even when he's not. Back then, he'd already been arrested several times for things like non-violent burglaries. The police, he says, strapped him to a wall, slapped him around, and then started asking him leading questions about a vague but brutal crime. They wanted him to admit to it. Instead, he told them this.

4. How does the narrator’s use of imagery help us to better understand this character? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Larry Ollins:** I don't know nothing. I can't tell you nothing because I don't know nothing. I know a little bit about the law because I have been arrested before, man. I'm not taking no murder case or no rape and all this other stuff. I'll take one of them missing candy bar cases you all got missing in the back, but I ain't going to be able to do this, man.

**Shane Dubow:** The police were unable to bully a confession from Larry, but their tactics worked better on his friend, Marcellius Bradford and his 14-year-old cousin, Calvin. Marcellius says the police beat him up until he gave in. Calvin says he was tricked. After keeping him for hours, Calvin says, the police told him that if he'd just sign a confession, he could go home and see his mom. He signed. They locked him up instead. And because both confessions also named Larry, the police locked him up too, in solitary confinement, without even fully explaining his charges.

**Larry Ollins:** I'm sitting in that room. I can't come out. I'm in there 24 hours a day for about a week. I was just so depressed, man, from not understanding how it was that they pulled this stuff off that I couldn't even eat. I couldn't even drink. And I wasn't using the washroom that much. All this stuff just happened instantly. And when they detained me and put me in this room, I could hear the TV out there. I could hear the TV, and it would get real quiet because the TV is talking about me.

**Female Reporter:** Well, two of three teenagers being held in the rape and murder of medical student Lori Roscetti are being held without bond tonight. 17-year-old Marcellius Bradford, shown here in the yellow hat, appeared in court today along with 16-year-old Larry Ollins, who is being tried as an adult.

5. What are the names and ages of the three young men who were arrested? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Larry Ollins:** And I could hear through my doors because it's got big cracks through the doors. And it's talking about the Roscetti case and this and that. So I put my ear to the door and I'm starting to hear the story.

**Male Reporter:** With one of the youths driving, Roscetti was taken a mile south to this isolated stretch of railroad tracks.

**Police Representative:** Once at the location, one of the offenders took Miss Roscetti out of the vehicle to the rear of the auto and brutally violated her. An argument ensued between the first offender and the others over who would assault the lady next.

**Man:** This is a particularly gruesome crime and the ages involved of the people that perpetrated it is absolutely incredible.

**Shane Dubow:** One of the things that's so amazing about watching these old newscasts is how even now, even after these four men have been completely cleared and the real killers have not only confessed on video but been matched with crime scene DNA, even now, you watch that old footage and you think, thank God they caught those terrible kids. You see them in handcuffs, you hear they confessed, and then there's the details of the crime, which seem so believably specific.

**Male Reporter:** Police say at one point, Miss Roscetti was able to break loose from the gang and tried to run away.

**Shane Dubow:** Lori had been carjacked, police said, at the corner of **Loomis** and Flournoy. One of her attackers had needed cab fare. They'd all been teenage friends. And then after the first one had raped her, they'd had an argument about who would go next. 15 years later, now that the real killers have confessed, we know all those details are bogus. So where did they come from in the first place?

**TEXT TO TEXT: Which character from a novel we read this year once lived on Loomis in the City of Chicago?**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Kathleen Zellner, the four men's attorney, keeps a handgun in her desk and has an air of someone who's seen a lot and wouldn't mind shooting most of it. She discovered where those details came from completely by accident when she noticed a name buried in an old police report. Apparently, the famous FBI profiler Robert Ressler had analyzed the case. That means he'd done what profilers do, which is he'd studied the evidence and made an educated guess, a profile of the sort of suspects the police ought to look for. But this profile wasn't in any of the police reports. And so, because she's Kathleen Zellner, she then flipped to the world famous profiler's name in her Rolodex.

**Kathleen Zellner:** So I called him at his home. I have his home number. And I called him and I said, "I want to talk to you about the Roscetti case." He said, "I remember that case." He said, "I did a profile on that." And I said, "Yeah, but you didn't write it up." And he said, "Yeah, I did. It's in my book." And I said, "What's your book called?" And he said, "*Whoever Fights* *Monsters*." And I said, "I've got that on my bookshelf. Let me put you on hold." I said, "What page is it on?" He knew the page. So I went over and I got the book and I opened it and I thought, my God, I'm looking at the confession.

**Shane Dubow:** Ressler's best guess profile matched exactly what Calvin and Bradford confessed to. To Kathleen, it looked like the police had taken Ressler's scenario, filled it in with some local names and details, forced her clients to sign it, and then called it a confession.

*Whoever* *Fights* *Monsters* by Robert Ressler, page 166. "My guess was based on what I thought was likely to have happened after Roscetti had left the garage. She probably stopped at a light in this run-down district and some people came up to her, locked the car, and one pulled a door, which happened to be open. To my mind, this had been an opportunistic crime. The attempt to rob had been a primary motivator and the sexual assault was secondary.

**Police Representative:** It was subsequently learned that the reason Miss Roscetti was victimized originally was because one of the four offenders needed money to get to his home in Cabrini-Green. And the group had decided to rob the first person who comes along.

**Male Reporter:** Detectives will not reveal the specifics of how the case was solved. Meanwhile, police are now searching for a fourth suspect. Steve Sanders, WGN News.

**Shane Dubow:** When the real killers were caught, they explained what actually happened. They jumped Lori Roscetti in an alley near her house, not at the corner Loomis and Flournoy. There were only two of them, not four. They were adults, not teenagers. And neither needed money to get home.

The Chicago Police declined to be interviewed for this story. Because of pending lawsuits, they're not commenting publicly on the case. But if the original defendants are to be believed, what happened next, in 1987, was this. The police didn't just sell their version of the crime to the TV stations. They also tried to sell it to some possible witnesses. Omar Saunders says he was brought to the Area 4 headquarters on February 11 by detectives James Mercurio and Thomas Lamb. Omar says it soon became clear what they wanted from him.

**Omar Saunders:** This is detective Mercurio and his partner Lamb telling me, "We want you to say that on the night of this crime, you was breaking into some railroad cars. You was attempting to break into some railroad cars and you heard a scream. And you began to walk towards the direction of Ashland where you heard the screams. And as you got closer, you noticed four black guys and a white--" This was their words. Four black guys and a white broad. This was their words. I'm like, "I'm not saying that."

**Shane Dubow:** So basically, they wanted you to say that you were a witness to seeing these other guys committing the crime?

**Omar Saunders:** Exactly. I would have not even been arrested for this case had I went on ahead and took the deal.

**Shane Dubow:** But, of course, by refusing to tell the detectives what they wanted to hear, he didn't take the deal and he, along with Larry and Calvin, got charged with the murder.

**Shane Dubow:** Do you think they ever, even in the very beginning, ever thought that you were really involved and then took it so far where they couldn't backtrack? They got in too deep an had to cover it up. Or do you think they never thought you were involved and it was just straight from the beginning a massive fraud?

**Omar Saunders:** I'm convinced, from what I went through and what I know today that they never once thought that I was guilty.

6. How does this connect to Tom Robinson’s jury? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Shane Dubow:** Omar, Larry, and Calvin all had separate trials and uphill legal fights. Remember, the crime's details were ugly, the case was big news, and the state's attorney, Richard Daley-- current mayor, by the way-- really, really, didn't want to lose. Omar's powerfully built with a shaved head, a huge grin, and an easy charisma. He remembers sitting at the defendant's table with the victim's family seated behind him.

**Omar Saunders:** If eyes could kill, I'd have been dead. I'd have turned into a pillar of salt because it was-- and it's only justifiable that people were feeling that way because they were misled. But I was sitting in that courtroom and I knew I wasn't supposed to be sitting there.

**Shane Dubow:** And was your family there?

**Omar Saunders:** No, nobody. I had one cousin. Her name was Iyo. She showed up with her son, Brandon. People, for me, didn't even want to show up in the courtroom because it was always filled with people from the victim. In fact, the day, I think, when I got sentenced. No, I was going for sentencing. And I was listening to WGCI, if I'm correct, they was talking about our case. It was early in the morning. They said, "Well, from what I've read, I understand that the Saunders kid likes it cold," meaning that I had sex with the victim when she was dead.

All these listeners listened to him say that. Any little vestige of integrity that I was trying to hold onto, man, they tore my whole character down, destroyed, obliterated it when they said that. Even some of the female associates that I had. They would come and visit me. I could look in their eyes and see they were trying to find the person that had been described over the radio.

All I had to hold on to was the truth that I'm innocent and that the truth is going to prevail. Because at that time, I was reading the Bible very, very hard. And that scripture that said the truth will set you free, I'm just recording that. Know the truth and the truth will set you free. So I'm drawing that, well, there's a God. I'm totally innocent. The jury's going to bring back a not guilty verdict. I don't care what nobody says because I read this book and that's what this book says.

**Shane Dubow:** At Calvin's trial, things didn't go much better. And at Larry's trial, it was more of the same.

**Larry Ollins:** You don't think that some rinky-dink cop that goes to some neighborhood, "Somebody saw a license plate. Let me knock on these doors, ask a few questions," got the power to just make up a story, give it to the media, and the whole world becomes involved in it. Because I saw all this stuff in *Time* *Magazine*. My lawyer had the *Time* *Magazine* right on the desk. This case, I never thought about them having this much power.

**Shane Dubow:** The prosecution was slightly hampered by the fact that the men they were prosecuting weren't guilty. Even at the time, the state conceded that the physical evidence was slim. At Calvin's trial, they relied on his confession, even though by then he'd taken it back. At Larry's trial, they relied on Marcellius Bradford.

Marcellius Bradford is the one defendant in the case who you won't be hearing from. The reason is that, after being released in 1992, he got rearrested on shoplifting charges in 1998 and is still locked up. He was out in the first place, of course, because he'd cut this deal with the prosecutors. They'd agreed to drop some charges. He'd agreed to testify against Larry, which meant he'd have to take the stand, stare out at his friend, tell the whole world how they'd raped and murdered Lori Roscetti, and all Larry could do was sit and listen.

**Larry Ollins:** Bradford, man, told them all of this stuff. And it was just weird because I knew everything he was saying was false. And he knew everything he was saying was false. And it was just amazing to see how that can really take place. You sit up there and say you actually did all those things that you know you didn't do, you know I didn't do. You could change this whole thing around right now. Just tell them it didn't happen. That'd change the whole complexity of the whole trial. "Wait a minute, what you doing, Bradford? Hold on, your honor, I would like to have a five-minute recess." And he would've been like, "No, let this play on out." Threw the whole jury for a loop. But that didn't take place.

**Omar Saunders:** The day that the jury returned the verdict--

**Shane Dubow:** Here's Omar.

**Omar Saunders:** --they had a paper and they handed to the bailiff and the bailiff handed it to the judge. The judge was looking at it. And he looked up and he said, "This is your verdict." And I was so shocked. Because there was women in the jury box that actually smiled at me one time when a certain witness was on the stand. He was caught in lies. And she was shaking her head like this is crazy. And I was just sure I had that juror on my side.

Anyway, when they all answered guilty, guilty, guilty, I just put my head down and a deep resentment and anger took over. I put one of my feet up on the table. That was my way to prevent myself from crying in front of the world. The anger. After they escorted me out of the courtroom, I went in the back, and that's when I let the tears roll. I was like, "man, they found me guilty for this."

7. How does this mirror the Robinson trial? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Shane Dubow:** Calvin, Omar, and Larry got life, only because they were too young for capital punishment. At Larry's sentencing, the judge said, "If any crime ever called out for the death penalty, it's this one. I want to make certain you never walk the streets of this city or any other city again." Bradford, for framing his friends, got a 12-year deal, though years later, he'd tell a reporter, "I think about this every day and I will skateboard into hell."

**Omar Saunders:** When you go to prison, you in a zone full of predators. Real, live predators that's looking for a weakness in some person.

**Shane Dubow:** When they arrived in prison, Calvin was 15, Omar 19, Larry 18. Larry felt particularly bewildered.

**Larry Ollins:** A lot of guys been there, in and out, in and out, in and out, before I even got there. So it's an environment that they're accustomed to. Soon as they come through the door, they know what to do, know who to get with, all that kind of stuff. I didn't know this stuff. So to me, it was almost like being a rabbit and trying to stay clear of a hawk that's way up in the sky that sees me out in the open field.

And I'm just fresh on the news. I've got a bunny tail. My ears are super long. The hawk ain't ate in a week. C'mon, man. And I ain't got no hair on my face. None of this-- I don't even have a scar on my face when I went through that. All I had was a little mole on my face. What's her name? Cindy Crawford was just becoming big. She got one, and they freaking off of her. Her poster's on people's walls in jail. This is just real. I'm telling you what's real. And guys think like that and get to lusting after you. You can become that kind of prey.

**Omar Saunders:** When I came to Joliet, I was automatically fearful--

**Shane Dubow:** This is Omar.

**Omar Saunders:** --and aggressive because I was angry. My logic was weak. For me to process what happened to me, I just categorize one race. White people is evil. That was my generalization. Everybody that did this to us was white. Can you imagine from my perspective? The policeman was white. The victim was white. The judge was white. The prosecuting attorney was white. Everybody was white that done this. That's the only way I can process it. They're just naturally evil. But as I got older and the time went on in prison, I began to see that evil didn't have a color.

**Shane Dubow:** Over time, they all found ways to cope. Omar lifted weights and read law books. Larry studied his transcripts. Calvin shot pool. But there were certain things they never got used to. For instance, here's something you never think about with prisons. You're basically locked in a teeny room with another person, a couple of beds, and a toilet.

**Omar Saunders:** You could really call them cells a bathroom.

**Larry Ollins:** And I remember nights when I was in the cell and my celly--

**Shane Dubow:** You know, his cellmate.

**Larry Ollins:** --got up and used the bathroom, I just woke up because [LAUGHTER]

**Omar Saunders:** That's rough.

**Larry Ollins:** And the toilet's right by the bed. Just imagine you going to the bathroom and I'm sleeping in the bathroom. I'm sleeping right there.

**Omar Saunders:** I used to sleep with the blanket over my eyes. Conditioned myself to sleep with the sheet or a blanket over my head just for that occasion. Just in case my celly get up tonight.

**Shane Dubow:** Maybe it's because they were innocent. Maybe it's the sort of thing lots of prisoners figure out. But Omar says that after a while, even though everyone around them claimed to be innocent, it wasn't hard to tell who actually was. They just stuck out.

**Omar Saunders:** I think I was able to sense it from watching guys' actions. Actions spoke louder than their words. They would act like they were free. They woud go to the law library. Always in the library fighting their case. They walk with a sense of integrity. You see it in their eyes, that same spirit that burn like your own do.

**Shane Dubow:** Unfortunately, even though they could see innocence in other prisoners, other prisoners couldn't always see it in them. Other prisoners thought they were rapists. And being a rapist in prison isn't good. It makes other prisoners want to attack you. Because if there's one thing prisoners miss in prison, it's women.

**Larry Ollins:** So guys learn this stuff when they get snatched away from women and get put in the penitentiary. So you come in there for taking what they miss and what they learned to have love and respect for, they're willing to bring all kind of harm to you at will at the blink of an eye, when your psychology least expects.

**Shane Dubow:** To Larry and Omar, this was a reoccurring event. They'd be in the showers, or in the yard, or just about anywhere at any time, and they'd get attacked. In one fight, maybe a dozen guys came at them with ice picks and Omar got stabbed 14 times.

A quick review. DNA testing first started making its way into criminal court cases in the late '80s. By the mid-'90s, cases of DNA testing getting innocent guys out of prison were starting to make headlines and prisoners everywhere were following the news. Larry got excited. Omar wasn't convinced. He'd become the group's unofficial lawyer by then. He'd written appeals, sent letters to journalists and civil rights groups, attacked various parts of the prosecution's testimony, and no one wrote back. Or when they did write back, they wrote things like the judge, who called Omar's last petition frivolous and patently without merit.

Larry didn't care. He kept returning to a single key point. Based on biological evidence found at the crime scene, the prosecution knew the blood type of Lori Roscetti's murderers. The murderers were a blood type called O secreter. To Larry, there'd always been something sketchy about that part of the case and the testimony of the crime lab expert, Pamela Fish. But whenever he'd try to bring this up, Omar would shake his head. Until one day, Omar says.

**Omar Saunders:** I think it was in '98. We was in the yard. And Larry was telling me, he said, "Man, Omar." He called me O. "Man, O, we've got to put something in court, man." And I said, "Man, I done tried everything. And there ain't nothing working. Every little thing, they're shooting it down." And Larry said, "Man, I'm telling you, it's the semen."

**Shane Dubow:** Among the many things that jump out at you here is just how quickly you can get used to a word like semen, especially if it's the key to your freedom and you talk about it every day.

**Omar Saunders:** And he was real tentative when he was stating it because he knew how I felt about this. We had separate trials, and in my trial, they said that the semen was consistent with Calvin, Larry, and Bradford.

**Shane Dubow:** Meaning the semen found at the crime scene was the same blood type as Calvin, Larry, and Bradford's.

**Omar Saunders:** And I'm like, is it a possibility I'm the only one innocent? That started to set in. I'm like, damn, you know? And Larry, this particular day, he was just insistent about the semen. "I'm telling you, it's the--" I'm like, "No, it ain't the semen. Because at my trial, the woman said it was consistent with all three of you all. I'm the only one excluded." He said, "No, that ain't what she said at my trial."

**Shane Dubow:** At Larry's trial, the prosecution admitted that the semen found at the scene didn't match Larry either.

**Omar Saunders:** And that stuck with me. Wait a minute. You sure? I'm like, "Send me your trial transcript of Pamela Fish's testimony so I can read it myself." And when he sent me her trial transcript testimony, my eyes watered up because legally, I knew what it meant. We free.

**Shane Dubow:** What they'd discovered was this. The prosecution had given conflicting testimony. Its crime lab expert, Pamela Fish, had made it seem like at least one of them matched up with the semen found at the crime scene. In fact, none of them did. To move ahead, however, to move one step closer to getting out, they needed Calvin's signature on an affidavit verifying his blood type, verifying that he was also a non-secretor just like them. It couldn't be simpler, except for one problem. Calvin wouldn't sign.

**Calvin Ollins:** I was sitting in my room one night and all of the sudden I got a letter from Omar, "Sign this piece of paper. " I'm like, "No, I'm not going to sign this piece of paper, man."

**Shane Dubow:** Calvin, tell about why you don't sign pieces of paper.

**Calvin Ollins:** It's how I got locked up. Last time I signed a piece of paper, I went to jail for life.

**Shane Dubow:** And what was that piece of paper you signed?

**Calvin Ollins:** Confessions that the police made up and had me sign.

**Shane Dubow:** He wrote them back a letter explaining his new policy on signing his name. Omar couldn't believe it.

**Omar Saunders:** I remember that letter. Yeah, I know man. You were saying, "I got your affidavit. I'm sorry to let you know that I can't sign y'all affidavit." He called it y'all affidavit. "Y'all affidavit. And I just want to let you all know that I accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal lord and savior and I wish you all well." Larry cried. I'll never forget this. Larry cried when he read that letter because Calvin was putting it on, "I don't want to sign nothing. I'll put my faith totally in God. That's it."

And I was trying to find a way how can I reach him and make him understand that that ain't the way the God I believe in works. Your faith in God is good, but act on it. You can't say you believe in no God and don't believe in your own ability to think, reason, and understand because he gave you a brain to do just that with.

**Shane Dubow:** In the end, to make a long story short, Calvin signed. They now had the documents to prove that none of them were the same blood type as the killers. But just getting a judge to look at this new evidence was a huge long shot. And it's not as if they'd been so successful at filing their own appeals. Then, one day, Omar came across a magazine profile of a trial lawyer named Kathleen Zellner. She was in the business of getting wrongfully convicted men out of prison. She liked DNA cases in particular, and then suing the state for big bucks.

**Omar Saunders:** When I saw Miss Zellner in the magazine, it was like, "This is is who we need. We need her." Because you can see she's like a hawk. When she sees something, she focuses in on it. So I knew if I could get her to see what Larry caused me to see, this thing's going to be electric. And I just began to construct the letter based on the facts about us all being non-secretors and that the killer is an O secretor.

Then, with the facts that I was saying, I put in the what if. What if what I'm saying is true-- everything that I'm saying is true? What would be the repercussions? What would be the financial benefits for everybody involved? I know you're an attorney. I know you've got things that you've got to do. You don't want people taking up your time. This is a profession. This is something that you like doing. Well, here go the perfect case.

**Male Reporter:** We are going to interrupt [UNINTELLIGIBLE] report for just a moment to bring you this special update. Moments ago, two of those three men wrongfully imprisoned for a rape/murder in 1986 were set free.

**Female Reporter:** Let's go live there now.

**Omar Saunders:** I've prepared a statement for the press. First, I would like to thank God for returning to us our freedom and for bringing into our struggle our attorney Miss Zellner and her associates--"

**Shane Dubow:** On December 5 of 2001, Omar, Larry, and Calvin were finally released. 15 years after their original arrests. 18 months after Kathleen Zellner received Omar's letter. She'd logged 800 unpaid hours and spent $50,000 of her own money to get the case back in court. Along the way, she'd had an independent lab test her clients' DNA and none of it matched the DNA from the crime scene. Faced with this new evidence, the state's attorney let them out. The footage that you're hearing is from the press conference outside the prison.

**Male Reporter:** --police. They're intimating that you were still involved somehow.

**Omar Saunders:** Well, I believe that they've got to stand on their position. They know the facts about-- now you all did a great job in revealing the facts, so I think they know what's coming. I used to quote a statement, that the heavens ablaze with light and the distant thunder seem to herald forth a coming storm. And they know that the storm is coming. That's the truth about this case. So they can say what they want to say. But it'll bear out in the future proceedings in another courtroom.

**Shane Dubow:** What's missing from this press conference is a review of how many things could have happened to keep these guys from getting out. Before Omar wrote to Kathleen, for example, he wrote to the nation's best known wrongful conviction expert, Barry Scheck. Barry Scheck contacted the police about reviewing the Roscetti case evidence. The police told Barry Scheck that the evidence had been destroyed. Which means that if Kathleen Zellner hadn't had an inside court contact agree to double check for the supposedly destroyed evidence, and if upon finding that evidence Kathleen's contact hadn't agreed to keep it hidden in her desk, all could have been lost.

And that's just the beginning. Omar's letter to Kathleen could have never been read. Larry could have decided not to press his seminal insight that day in the yard. Calvin's faith in the Lord might have stopped him from signing that affidavit. Any one of them could have been killed in jail. And then there's the most likely thing that could have happened. They could have just lost hope.

**Male Reporter:** Did you ever give up hope?

**Omar Saunders:** Did I ever give up hope? No, I don't think I ever actually gave up completely. But there was a time I felt like I wanted to give up. Any other questions I would like to refer to my attorney.

**Shane Dubow:** Around the country there are thousands of cases in which people are reexamining DNA evidence. Maybe tens of thousands. But as of December, 2001, the month Calvin, Larry, and Omar got released, only 98 people had ever been released from prison based on DNA. It's still hard to get out of prison. Nearly all of those 98 had been convicted for sex crimes, which makes sense if you think about it. Those are the crimes where it's most likely that the biological evidence is still around somewhere to be tested, as it was in Omar, Larry, and Calvin's case.

In the months since their release, Omar, Larry, and Calvin have had to enter a new world full of big and small firsts. First time writing checks. First time taking driving tests. First time for Larry getting really lost. Now they call him Compass. First time for Omar getting in a fender bender. Now they call him Crash. And Calvin, in a first of his own, tried to adopt a cat only to be screened out by an animal control clerk who denied his application because he lacked a job history.

And then there's their obsession with pictures. Almost every time I visited, they wanted to take pictures or they wanted to show me pictures of people they'd recently met. Lots of them were basically strangers, like kids they'd talked to at a high school. But after 15 years in prison, it sort of makes sense. They don't have a history, and so they're filling photo albums trying to catch up.

The last time producer Alex Blumberg and I sat down with Omar in Kathleen Zellner's suburban office, we ended up having a long chat about the Declaration of Independence. Omar had read it in prison.

**Omar Saunders:** When I read that document, I was like, wow, that it actually incorporates rebelling against an oppressive government. If the government becomes too oppressive, the power is actually in our hands. That's why when you talk to anybody that claims-- especially these people that speak about the American character and what we should do-- you should ask them, "Let me hear you recite the Declaration of Independence."

**Shane Dubow:** Omar looks over at us and recites from memory.

**Omar Saunders:** "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And you will come to find out that the average American don't even know it.

**Alex Blumberg:** What was that like to read that document and know in light of what had happened to you, is that-- it sounds like what you were just saying is that it actually made it seem like America's actually on your side.

**Omar Saunders:** America is all-- the concepts and principles on which the country is founded has always been on our side.

**Alex Blumberg:** You talk about what you like when you went in. And it almost sounds like you've had this horrific miscarriage of justice done against you. And here you are on the other side of it. And you have more respect for the system than maybe when you went in, in a way.

**Omar Saunders:** Yeah, because I understand that it's a lack of understanding the system that caused this. It's like if the police do something to me, I ain't going to go blow up the whole Chicago police force because you've got a lot of good Chicago policemen. That's why I always say that the media said that we got out and we spoke vehemently against the system. I never spoke against the system. I love America. I understand that the system don't operate itself. It's people. There ain't nothing wrong. America's got one of the greatest jurisprudence systems in the world. Some countries, when you do something, they kill you. Ain't nothing to talk about. See?

So my whole view today is I understand that if we want to make America a greater place, it's going to take people like us to understand what the nation is based on and do what the Founding Fathers did when they thought that their freedoms were being jeopardized and that their rights were being infringed. You do that by knowing the law. When you don't know something, people can take advantage. This is a beautiful democratic republic.

**Shane Dubow:** One day a few weeks ago I went to court with Larry, Calvin, and Omar. The real killers had some early hearing to show up for. This would be a first chance to see them face to face. But for some reason, the hearing got postponed. Walking out in the hallway of this giant, stone building, Larry, Calvin, and Omar suddenly froze. They stared as a stooped, older man shuffled toward us. Calvin blurted out, "It's Patrick O'Brien."

This was the man who'd prosecuted their case, the man who'd called them rapists and murderers, the man who they held most responsible for stealing half their lives. He looked up at them and seemed to experience the same momentary shock. You could see him almost start to turn around, but then it was too late and we were passing by him and he was nodding his head. What he said was, "Gentlemen."

**Ira Glass:** Shane DuBow in Chicago. Coming up, how to make a 14-year-old suburban kid confess to the murder of his own sister when he did not do it. In a minute from Public Radio International and Chicago Public Radio when our program continues.